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The 1775 Correspondence of John Wesley and Francis Okely

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ABSTRACT: On August 14, 1775, Francis Okely of Northampton, England, wrote a letter to the General Synod of the Moravian Church. Though a Moravian minister, his letter sought permission to preach for John Wesley in Towcester. Within his letter, Okely gave background to his request, including a paraphrase of a letter he had written to Wesley between July 24 and 31, 1775. His letter also reproduced a verbatim copy of the reply he later received from Wesley, dated July 31. This correspondence, apparently only preserved within Okely's August 14 letter, has never been published. It offers important insights into some of the interdenominational efforts to promote evangelical unity and to re-ignite evangelical revival in England.

On August 14, 1775, Francis Okely, the Moravian minister in Northampton, England, wrote to the General Synod of the Moravian Church in Barby, Germany, explaining the occasion of a recent two-letter correspondence he had had with celebrity evangelist and founder of the Methodist movement John Wesley.¹ The purpose of Okely's letter to the General Synod was to

1. Okely to General Synod, August 14, 1775, R.13.D.46.a.7, Unitätsarchiv, Herrnhut, Germany (hereafter cited as UA). I am grateful

to Dr. Rüdiger Kröger, archivist at the Unitätsarchiv in Herrnhut for permission to reproduce these documents.

request permission to preach for Wesley in Towcester, England. He had previously consulted with Wesley and gained his enthusiastic support. He now only had to seek the support of his superiors in the Moravian Church.

Within his letter to the Moravian authorities, Okely preserves two letters—the first, from Okely to Wesley and undated, he summarizes in the space of a paragraph; the second, a reply from Wesley to Okely and dated July 31, 1775, he transcribes verbatim. These two letters serve Okely's larger purpose of exploring the possibility of preaching in Towcester, then receiving Wesley's support, and finally seeking permission from the Moravian Church.

This brief and, until now, unpublished correspondence is of interest because it preserves new details of Wesley's biography and ministry as well as Okely's. More significantly, however, this correspondence magnifies and illuminates some of the intricacies of evangelical church politics and personalities within the late eighteenth-century Atlantic world, particularly in the wake of the evangelical revivals.

John Wesley (1703–91) is, of course, a familiar character in church history. The son of a devout and formidable Christian woman; elder brother to one of the greatest hymn writers in the Church; in Oxford, the companion of future evangelical leaders such as George Whitefield, John Gambold, and Benjamin Ingham, all members of the Holy Club; missionary in colonial Georgia; earnest leader in the London Fetter Lane society, until abruptly he became its most earnest detractor²; founder of the Methodist movement, yet a committed Church of England priest; the most important promoter of evangelical heart religion in eighteenth-century England; a prolific writer; a controversial but always orthodox Protestant theologian; and, constant throughout his eighty-seven years, one of the most considerable public personalities—at the same time intensely charismatic and prone to conflict.

Francis Okely (1718–92), by comparison, plays a relatively minor role in the history of eighteenth-century Protestantism. A changeable man along denominational lines, what appears most constant in him are his deep, perhaps brooding, Pietist sensibilities and his ever-heightening panic over the apparent ruin of his favored conversionist heart religion (as he referred to it) under the tidal wave of Enlightenment rationalism.³ Originally from Bedford, he was a student at St. John's College, Cambridge,

2. Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728–1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29–77.

3. See my "Evangelicalism and Enlightenment: Two Generations in the Okely Family," in *Self, Community, World: Moravian Education in a*

where he helped guide a band of high church evangelicals, described by historian John Walsh as the Cambridge Methodists.⁴ Following a very brief spell as a Baptist pastor that ended in excommunication, Okely inclined hastily toward Moravianism, a path that took him right to the epicenter of the controversial Moravian *Sichtungszeit*⁵ in Herrnhag, Germany, in the late 1740s. He himself would later grieve his complicity in the excesses he believed transpired during this time.⁶ His ministry among the Moravians was interrupted by a very brief itinerancy with John Wesley in 1758, after which, apart from the Moravians, he labored as schoolmaster in Bedford. In the 1760s he sought (ultimately unsuccessfully) Church of England ordination.⁷ In his later years, having returned to the Moravian fold, Okely busied himself as a school teacher, classicist, translator of continental

Transatlantic World, ed. Paul Peucker and Heikki Lempa, (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 128–33.

4. Walsh, “The Cambridge Methodists,” in *Christian Spirituality. Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. Peter Brooks (London: SCM Press, 1975), 249–83.

5. “Sifting time” in English. A reference to Luke 22:31, the term was meant to convey a trying though ultimately good process of spiritual refinement or purification. A subject of continuing historical debate, recent scholarship increasingly indicates that the period—as it was originally understood—should be dated to 1748–1749 mainly in the German settlements of Herrnhag and Marienborn in the Wetterau. Consensus regarding the principal characteristics of the period is, however, still a lively question, though Paul Peucker has most persuasively argued that a central feature of the period was the ritualization of homoerotic mystical language among single brothers; see Peucker, “Blut’ auf unsre grünen Bändchen’: Die Sichtungszeit in der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine,” *Unitas Fratrum: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Gegendwartsfragen der Brüdergemeine*, nos. 49/50 (2002): 41–94, and Peucker, “‘Inspired by Flames of Love’: Homo-sexuality, Mysticism, and the Moravian Brothers around 1750,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (January 2006): 30–64. For a fascinating overview of the tumultuous historiography of the subject, see Craig D. Atwood, “Interpreting and Misinterpreting the Sichtungszeit,” in *Neue Aspekte der Zinzendorf-Forschung*, ed. Martin

Brecht and Paul Peucker, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Pietismus 47* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 174–87.

6. “At that Season also the general Levity and Dissipation amongst both Labourers and People prevailed and increased. To avoid the Odium of a Preaching Spirit, little or nothing solid was ever spoken amongst our own selves about Heart’s Matters. How it went with others in their secret Converse with our Savr., and in Prayer, is not for me to say; but with me, tho’ often attempted, it went poor enough. Conferences and Meetings of all Sorts went on of Course; but they seemed to go on in a customary Manner, as if it were pro forma and our Religion was confined to Time and Place; whilst Eating, Drinking, Dressing, with the best we could get; Squandering away Money, Joking, Playing, Trifling, Visiting and Jaunting about from Place to Place (and all this under the Pretext of Labour upon Souls, but yet more in Reality for Self-Gratification than for Benefit and Care of them)—this, I say, seemed for the most Part to be the principal and daily Matter. To say nothing of Jealousies, Envyings, evil Surmisings, Caballings, and outrageously shameful Quarrels, which too often broke out and occurred in these Circumstances, wherein we had so little or no Heart’s Intimacy with and Confidence to one another.” Okely to Unity Elders’ Conference, March, 4, 1777, R.13.D.46.a.11, UA.

7. Okely to Unity Elders’ Conference, March, 4, 1777, R.13.D.46.a.11, UA. See also Podmore, *Moravian Church*, 287–89.

Christian mystical books,⁸ and, it would seem, a fatigued and eccentric minister. Okely's religious biography is, possibly, most fascinating in the way he moved so easily between folds (Methodist, Moravian, and mystical), unwittingly resuscitating and then sustaining dialogue between Moravians and Methodists. The following correspondence exemplifies his outsized and little-known role in this process.

WESLEY AND OKELY BEFORE 1775

In his letter (below) Francis Okely mentions Wesley's "late recovery," a reference to his near deadly fever during his travels in northern Ireland during the summer of 1775. For Methodists, Wesley's illness had revived concern as to the fate of Methodism if he died, which in turn reawakened questions about the quality of Methodist preachers, their ordination, and even the prospect of a Methodist Church of England. This likely provides some of the context for Wesley's comments encouraging Okely to preach in Methodist meeting houses as often as possible.

Wesley, it is clear from the July 31, 1775, letter below, had not forgotten his tour of Ireland in 1758 when he was accompanied by Okely. Wesley had preached in Bedford (Okely's home) one evening when Okely, in a state of deep turmoil, approached the Methodist leader to confess that "he could not remain as he was any longer, that he had no rest in his spirit." On a sudden impulse he asked "to go with me [Wesley] without delay."⁹ They prayed

8. Okely translated the following works: Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, *Twenty one Discourses or Dissertations upon the Augsburg Confession, which is also the Brethren's Confession of Faith: Deliver'd by the Ordinary of the Brethren's Churches before the Seminary. To Which is Pre-fixed, a Synodal Writing Relating to the Same Subject. Translated from the High Dutch, by F. Okeley, B.A.* (London: W. Bowyer, 1753); Joanna Eleonora De Merlau, *The Nature and Necessity of the New Creature in Christ, Stated and Described According to Heart's Experience and True Practice*, 2nd ed., trans. with preface by Okely (London: 1772); the manuscript version of this volume is held at Bristol University Special Collections (BU): DM 451/13/3, as is Okely's unpublished manuscript translation of "The Memoirs of John William Petersen," BU: DM 451/13/3;

Hans Engelbrecht, *The Divine Visions of John Engelbrecht, a Lutheran Protestant, Whom God Sent from the Dead to by a Preacher of Repentance and Faith to the Christian World*, trans. Okely, 2 vols. (Northampton, U.K.: Thomas Dicey, 1780); Abraham von Franckenberg, *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial, and Wonderful Writings of Jacob Behmen [The Life by A. von Franckenberg with the Narrative of C. Weissner]*, trans. Okely (Northampton, U.K.: Thomas Dicey, 1780); Hendrik Janson, *A Faithful Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with Hiel*, trans. and ed. Okely (Northampton, U.K.: 1781).

9. *The Journal and Diaries of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980). Hereafter cited as JWJ.

together and agreed to rendezvous several days later to set out for Ireland. On March, 16 they met in Manchester. They traveled to Liverpool together, where, among other things, they dined with John Newton.¹⁰ Then on the March 28 they set sail for Dublin.

For Okely the reason for his departure from the Moravian Church into Methodist itinerancy, however brief it would ultimately be, was a long and agonizing spiritual depression.¹¹ In the last weeks of his time serving as Moravian minister at Wyke in West Yorkshire, Okely experienced what he then described as “an important Crisis.”¹² The nature of his crisis, it seems, was a deep unrest over his own ebbing spiritual state and also an overwhelming conviction that the Moravian Church was no longer the evangelical church it had once been—no longer an igniter of revival—and that he would have to depart from it, were his concerns not taken seriously. Abruptly, he set aside his post as minister in Wyke and journeyed to London to present his concerns to the authorities there, but he was hurt deeply when he was curtly dismissed as being spiritually amiss. Years later in 1777, he describes this experience: “I then faithfully confessed what I could not help fearing and believing, viz. ‘That the Whole Congn. was fallen from its first Simplicity’; tho’ no one seemed to attend to it; and Petrus¹³ in particular had told me, ‘He could weep Tears of Blood over me; and that I never should be right again in my Heart till I owned the Devil had given me these Suggestions, and the Direction thereupon by Lot.’¹⁴ A poor Consolation this, after my having rode 450 Miles to treat with Principals about the Burden and Distress of my Heart!”¹⁵ By the summer of 1757 he found himself returned to his hometown of Bedford, fully removed from the Moravian Church and of all pastoral duties. During a year of inactivity at home he cultivated a wish to try out, in Walsh’s words, “the heroic life of the field-preacher.” He sought out Wesley, and by March of 1758 he was sailing for Ireland.

10. Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* (Harper: 1882), 2:301.

11. Walsh, “Cambridge Methodists,” 275–77.

12. Fulneck Church Archives, Wyke Congregation Diary, March 23, 1757.

13. Bishop Peter Böhler (1712–1775).

14. The Moravian Church did practice lot-casting, but Okely’s habit of privately casting lots to make decisions was not endorsed by his church. On the Moravian practice of lot-casting, see Elisabeth Watkins Sommer, “Gambling with God: The Use of the Lot among the Moravian

Brethren in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998): 267–86.

15. R.13.D.46.a.11, UA. He records much the same comment in a letter to Johannes von Watteville from May 29, 1775 (R.13.D.46.a.11, UA): “I went up from Wyke to London, to speak to the Bottom with our dr deceased Petrus, then in London, and going to embark soon for Pensilvania.” He goes on, “I was much distressed about my own Situation, so I was equally the same at my Fears of the Brn’s being gone off from their first Simplicity.”

His ministry in Ireland with Wesley was short lived, however. After a few short months of shared ministry, Okely and Wesley parted ways in conflict. It seems Okely had declined the opportunity to preach for Wesley during the Methodist Conference in Bristol in August 1758 because he did not want to offend Bristol-area Moravians. As to this decision, Okely's explanation to Wesley involved some criticism of the Methodists, but Okely's main trouble was a continuing personal struggle over his own faith.¹⁶ Walsh sees here an unresolved tension in Okely's experience between the active life (embodied in Wesley) and the contemplative life (embodied in the mystic William Law, toward whom he would increasingly incline in subsequent years).¹⁷

Interestingly, John Newton sought to establish a correspondence with Okely in the months following his breach with Wesley. Clearly with intent to cheer and support Okely in the midst of difficulty, Newton gracefully reassured him that his charitable and nonpartisan Christian nature had been completely evident even in their brief conversation the previous spring in Liverpool: "I know not if my heart was ever more united to any person, in so short a space of time, than to you; and what engaged me so much was, the spirit of meekness and of love (that peculiar and inimitable mark of true Christianity) which I observed in you."¹⁸ Quite to the contrary, Wesley, even as late as 1768, continued to frustrate Okely with his polarizing preaching, ever further alienating Moravians from Methodists.¹⁹ Although a few years later in 1770 and 1771 Charles Wesley initiated an attempt at reconciling the two sides, which apparently led to an improved relationship between John Wesley and James Hutton, a leading Moravian.²⁰

OKELY'S LETTER TO THE GENERAL SYNOD, AUGUST 14, 1775

In the August 14 letter in which Okely reproduces his correspondence with Wesley, he notes that "by desire of all the People there" Okely received an invitation to preach at the Methodist meeting house in Towcester, a small town in the Methodist Northampton itinerate circuit and near Okely's home.²¹

16. *The Letters of John the Rev. John Wesley* (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 4:34–36.

17. Walsh, "Cambridge Methodists," 277–83. See also *The Private Journal and Literary Remains of John Byrom*, ed. Richard Parkinson (Chetham Society, 1857), 2:642–50.

18. *Letters by the Rev. John Newton*, ed. Josiah Bull (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1869), 18–19.

19. Northampton Congregation Diary (NCD), November 3, 1768, R.13.D.3, UA.

20. Clifford W. Towlson, *Moravian and Methodist: Relationships and Influences in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 157–65.

21. Francis Okely to the General Synod at Barby, Germany, August 14, 1775, R.13.D.46.a.7, UA.

It is important to note that Okely, by this time, had again fully given himself to the Moravian work in Northampton; but, it is at the same time critical to bear in mind that in doing so he had neither given himself to partisanship nor denominationalism.

For years Okely had been a convinced advocate of the common heart religion—conversionist, practical, and Christocentric in nature—of the Moravians and Methodists, as well as mystical writers like William Law. However partisan these different groups and individuals had been in his experience, Okely's twenty-four-year commitment to the Moravian work in Northampton (1768–92) was ultimately grounded in a belief that along with many other churches, the Moravian Church was advancing the common cause of “all Persons in all the Centuries, who have given any Symptoms of vital Religion,” as he put it several years earlier.²²

To Okely's way of thinking, this shared religion—which in the 1740s had triggered the evangelical revivals, and which in many ways was being kept alive by mystical writers such as Law—had become the common object of reproach among eighteenth-century rationalists.²³ This is how he expressed the point, having just read through a volume of the periodical *Monthly Review*: “I find not a single Book, containing any thing of Heart's Religion but what is dubbed by the odious Name of Fanaticism and Enthusiasm; and all reasoning Books, foreign and domestic, wherein our Savr is plainly set aside and rejected, are magnified to the Stars. Methodists, Mystics, and Moravians have one common Censure, but ours [Moravians] is the heaviest of them all; our Books are a mere Burlesque upon the New Testament, and we are Hottentots in Religion. This is certainly a Sign of the Times wherein we live. Heathenism is coming upon us with hasty Strides. I hope the Children of God of all Denominations will once see the Necessity of uniting under one Banner, that they may be able to maintain their own Ground, if not stop its Progress.”²⁴ To determine his response to the Towcester Methodists' invitation, Okely admitted to the General Synod that several weeks earlier he had privately cast lots, a habit he had fallen into, which had earned him some criticism.²⁵ The lot yielded an outcome in the

22. NCD, October 24, 1768, R.13.D.3, UA.

23. On the relationship between mysticism and evangelicalism in late eighteenth-century Britain, and especially on Okely's thoughts relating to this relationship, see B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 158–63.

24. NCD, November 19, 1768, R.13.D.3, UA.

25. Okely to von Watteville, May 29, 1775, R.13.D.46.a.6, UA. He received this criticism in London in 1757 after leaving Wyke. His May 29 letter records Böhler's harsh rebuke: “I hear you make much Use of the Lot, & I suppose you have even lotted about this too.” Naturally, Okely had. “Upon this Petrus

affirmative. Okely, in accordance with the Savior's command (the lot), was to preach for the Methodists on this one occasion, which he did. In his August 14 letter, Okely goes on to describe a subsequent consultation with Benjamin LaTrobe, the leading authority in the British Province of the Moravian Church. During this meeting it was decided that, as LaTrobe would put it, Okely could preach "occasionally, but not statedly" for Wesley.²⁶ The wariness sitting on the surface of LaTrobe's response seems to have motivated Okely to write back to Wesley sometime after July 24, 1775.

In this letter Okely explained that he could no longer preach in Towcester until the "whole Affair" had been weighed carefully by Wesley at the Methodist Conference in Leeds (August 1–3, 1775). By "whole Affair" Okely seems to mean the whole matter relating to whether he should preach in Towcester for Wesley. Because he kept no copy of his letter, Okely only records it in summary, while providing a complete transcription of Wesley's July 31 reply.²⁷

After providing this record of their correspondence, Okely presented his own sentiments. He affirmed his pledge of obedience to the Savior's will—i.e., the decision the Moravian authorities would make, no doubt, based on the lot. But he also expressed a tender desire to be of "any Use" in facilitating "a Mutually amicable disposition of the Brn. and the Methodists." Referencing Matthew 5:9, he confessed his own hope to being a peacemaker between the two parties, that such a reconciliation "might ultimately bring about that design of renewing the Awakening in England, which the late Disciple²⁸ seemed to have had at Heart and in View." In response, John Wesley explained that he would value Okely's work in both Towcester, Whittlebury, and "in any other part of England."

It is, perhaps, no coincidence that some eleven years later these two churches would enter into serious negotiations about a union.²⁹ Though never accomplished, the mere fact of these later negotiations testifies to

said with deep affected Howling he could almost weep Blood over me, & until I owned these Lots were given me by the devil I should never be happy."

26. Francis Okely to the General Synod at Barby, Germany, August 14, 1775, R.13.D.46.a.7, UA.

27. Okely also notes in his August 14, 1775, letter that Wesley made a personal visit to him in Northampton, perhaps stopping off during

the period between August 6 and 14 (see JWJ) when he traveled to and then stayed for a time in London. Okely notes that Wesley even "told several he would ride 100 Miles to have such another [meeting]."

28. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), the founder of the Renewed Moravian Church.

29. Towlson, *Moravian and Methodist*, 160–65.

some small role this correspondence may have played in an attempt not only to promote evangelical unity in England but to re-ignite the evangelical revivals as well.

LETTER I: FROM FRANCIS OKELY

[between 24 and 31 July 1775³⁰]

After some previous Reflecting relative to his late Recovery,³¹ I then related to him the Fact; that I had consulted my Brethren about it;³² & that, for Orders Sake,³³ and on Account of Consequences; which (tho' I meant nothing but a Furtherance of the common Salvation of Souls upon the ancient Plan of "Repentance towards God, & Faith towards our L^d. Jesus Christ," without Respect to Party either Way)³⁴ I could not stand for; I should ^{therefore} not proceed any further, unless he should desire me so to do. I repeated the Word desire; adding, that I had no Reason to Expect any such Thing; but only begged an Answer from him; Which I should conform myself to.

30. The chronology of Okely's letter makes clear that he wrote his letter to Wesley sometime after July 24, 1775. He writes, "On the 24th July last [month] I gave out publicly that I could promise no longer to preach there, till I had first made Mr. J. W. and his Conference acquainted with the Whole Affair." He then writes, "I soon after wrote a Letter to Mr. J.W. at Leeds." This letter naturally was written before July 31, the date of Wesley's reply. For discussion of the dating of the reply, see note 35 below.

31. From June 13 to July 26, 1775, Wesley had suffered from a serious fever, during the most intense period of which (from June 17–27) he was bedridden in Derryagh, northern Ireland, in the home of Edward Gayer, clerk to the Irish House of Lords.

32. Here Okely makes reference to the question of his permission to preach in Towcester.

33. Okely had been considered for Church of England ordination in 1763 in pursuance of Lord Dartmouth's offer of the curacy of Olney. He applied to the bishop of Lincoln and was ultimately refused at the opposition of Archbishop Secker; see Podmore, *Moravian Church*, 287–89,

and also Okely's own account of these events, which he dates only to between 1757 and 1768 (the dates of his departure from and return to the Moravian Church): "I, at Br. Johann Nitchmann's Instigation &c. treated with the Bp. of Lincoln; the Arch Bp. of Canterbury, and thro' them with the whole Bench of Bishops, about serving in Church of England; the Circumstances of which I faithfully made known at the Time, so that I have often since admired and adored the kind Hand [of God]; which, in Consequence of my Prayer at the Beginning and all along, frustrated this apparently feasible and well-meant Attempt. Br. Brodersen led me to a Renewal of it, as a Thing he averred to be according to the Mind of the Brn.; tho' he afterwards left me in the Lurch, when it appeared otherwise." R.13.D.46.a.11, UA.

34. Okely's assertion of a common gospel plan "without Respect to Party" hints at the longstanding hostilities that lived between the Moravian and the various Methodist communities, and his persistent hope of facilitating a peace between the two in the cause of the gospel.

Source: Unitätsarchiv, Herrnhut, Germany: R.13.D.46.a.7: Francis Okely at Northampton to the General Synod at Barby, Germany, August 14, 1775. Okely's undated summary of this letter to Wesley occurs within his letter to the General Synod of the Moravian Church. Okely introduces the summary of his letter to Wesley "at Leeds" with the note that "I took no Copy of it," but that it was "to this Effect."

Note: Wherever possible the editor has preserved Okely's original, including his abbreviations, underscoring, and insertions.

LETTER 2: TO FRANCIS OKELY

Leeds Augst. [July] 31st. 1775³⁵

My dear B^r,

Altho' I have at present Business enough upon my Hands, yet I must send you a Line without delay.—I have had the Proof of you: . ^{you preached} not many Years ago, in several of our Houses in Ireland.³⁶ I know not that ever you did Harm; but I believe you did Good thereby, and I am persuaded your Heart is as my Heart: We aim at the same Thing. Therefore I desire, that you would preach, as often as you have Opportunity, not only in our House at Towcester, but in that at Whittlebury³⁷ [about 3 or 4 Miles from Towcester and near a . ^{little} Farm of mine

35. This appears to have been an error in Okely's transcription. It is very likely that Okely meant July rather than August for two reasons. First, Wesley was still in Leeds on July 31, 1775, which is where the letter was sent from, and by August 31, 1775, he was in Bodmin, Cornwall. Second, August 31 would put the date of Wesley's letter after Okely's August 14 letter in which the former is transcribed, making the date of the transcription earlier than the date of the original.

36. Okely records his own reflections on a portion of his travels with Wesley in a April 9, 1758, letter to Byrom; see Byrom's *Journal*, 2: 645–48, reprinted in *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* 86 (1863): 1101–4.

37. In the Northamptonshire circuit, Towcester for Wesley seems always to have played a negative spiritual foil to Whittlebury. Reflecting on Whittlebury on June 21, 1763, he comments, "Here I found a truly loving and simple people." On October 22, 1778, he depicted Whittlebury as "the flower of all our Societies in the Circuit, both for zeal and simplicity." Then on November 19, 1781, he described Whittlebury as "still the loveliest congregation, as well as the liveliest Society in the circuit." And on October 20, 1788, he writes, "I set out for Northamptonshire. In the evening I preached to the lovely congregation at Whittlebury, standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free."

at Silston,³⁸ on the Oxford. Road] and in any other in any Part of England: and the oftner you do this, the more you will oblige Y^r. a^{ff}. F^d. and B^r. J. Wesley.

Source: Unitätsarchiv, Herrnhut, Germany: R.13.D.46.a.7: Francis Okely at Northampton to the General Synod at Barby, Germany, August 14, 1775. Okely provides a copy of Wesley's letter in his own hand within his letter to the General Synod of the Moravian Church. He introduces Wesley's letter with the following comment: "The answer is verbatim as follows."

Meanwhile, he depicts Towcester in rather more negative terms. On October 23, 1769, he writes, "I rode to Towcester, and preached to a heavy, unawakened people, on what they did not seem at all to think of, namely, that they were to die." On November 25, 1784, he preached "at the poor dead Towcester. But is not God able to raise the dead? There was a considerable shaking among the dry bones. And who knows

but these dry bones may live?" And again on October 22, 1788, he "made one more trial of poor Towcester; if haply God might yet breath on the dry bones, by opening and strongly apply these words, 'I will heal thy backsliding; I will love thee freely'" (JWJ).

38. Silston is now Silverstone; see JWJ, October 21, 1778.